

## GROUPS APPLAUD MOVE FOR STATE INDIGENT DEFENSE PROGRAM

The House Judiciary Indigent Defense Subcommittee started its hearings Tuesday on proposed legislation that would create a statewide indigent defense system, with organizations applauding the move.

Officials from the State Bar of Michigan and Campaign For Justice told the subcommittee a statewide program would be a bold move from the current system of mostly county programs.

However, officials cautioned lawmakers not to put the state public defender under the supervision of the Supreme Court, arguing the system needs independence.

They also urged lawmakers to make the public defense commission more geographically diverse.

But the elephant in the room is how the state would fund such a program, said Laura Sager, director of the Campaign For Justice.

Mary Lannoye, former state budget director and now a consultant for the campaign, said about \$80 million is currently spent by municipal courts and counties on indigent defense, but compared to per capita spending by other states, Michigan should be spending \$125 million.

She said the state could keep the local funding intact and find a way to cover the funding gap either through general funds or through court-related funding like criminal and civil fines.

Chair Rep. Bob Constan (D-Dearborn Heights) said the subcommittee is looking into ways to fund a state indigent defense program. The draft legislation currently includes probation order and bail fees.